TRANSPORTATION PROJECT REPORT

DRAFT DESIGN REPORT / DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT / DRAFT 4(f) EVALUATION

VOLUME 6

Appendix B7: Visual Impact Assessment Report

November 2016

PIN 5470.22
NYS Route 198 (Scajaquada Expressway) Corridor
Grant Street Interchange to Parkside Avenue Intersection
City of Buffalo
Erie County

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Department of Transportation

ANDREW M. CUOMO
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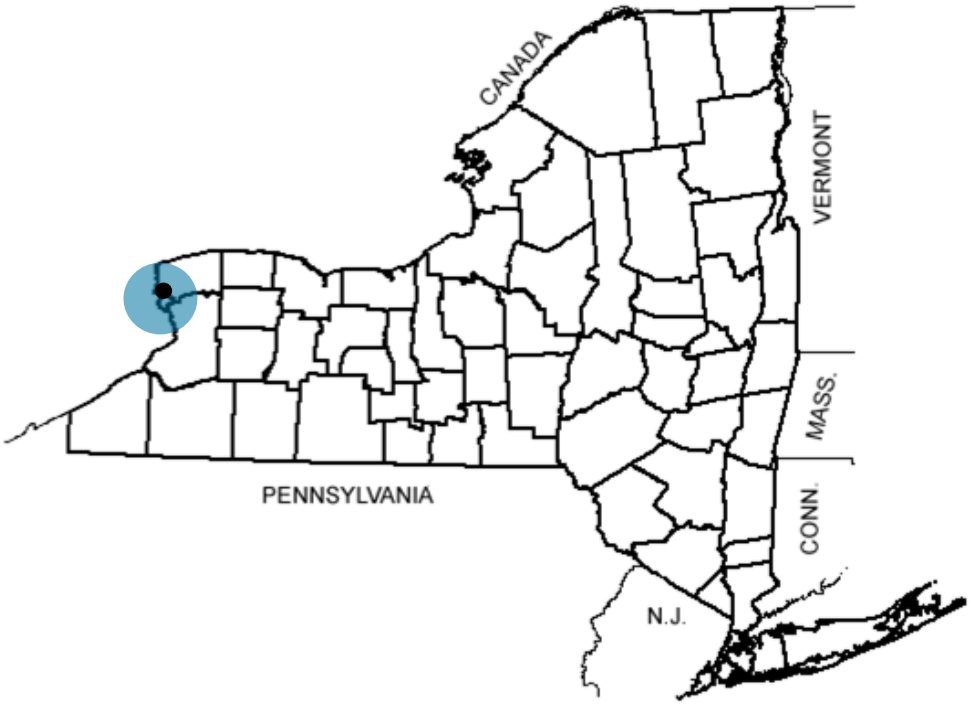

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NYS ROUTE 198 (SCAJAQUADA EXPRESSWAY) CORRIDOR
GRANT STREET INTERCHANGE TO PARKSIDE AVENUE INTERSECTION,
CITY OF BUFFALO, ERIE COUNTY

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT

CITY OF BUFFALO, ERIE COUNTY, NEW YORK
P.I.N. 5470.22 / November 2016

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Visual Impact Assessment

1. Introduction

The proposed project is located in the City of Buffalo, Erie County, New York as shown in Figure 1, and addresses the corridor needs along NYS Route 198 (Scajaquada Expressway). This report presents the findings of a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the proposed feasible alternative as shown in Figures 2 and 2A.

2. Project Description

NYS Route 198 (Scajaquada Expressway) is an Urban Principal Expressway on the National Highway System connecting Interstate 190 and NYS Route 33 with traffic volumes between 37,000 and 65,000 vehicles per day, a posted speed limit of 50 mph (recently changed to 30 mph in response to a fatal accident), and grade separated interchanges. While providing an important transportation function, the Scajaquada Expressway is out of context with much of its surroundings which includes a nationally renowned art gallery, educational institutions, a historic cemetery, historic buildings, residential neighborhoods, the aesthetic and historic Olmsted-designed Delaware Park, historic Forest Lawn Cemetery, and Scajaquada Creek.

Broad community support, originating with an initiative in the late 1980s, continues to focus on the need to increase the compatibility of the roadway with its surrounding community.

In summary, there is a need to:

- Improve the compatibility of the roadway with its surroundings;
- Maintain the critical transportation link between I-190 and NYS Route 33;
- Maintain local connectivity for all modes of travel;
- Correct geometric features that do not meet current design standards;
- Reduce the disparity between vehicular operating speeds, the posted speed limit, and the design speed;
- Address historically higher than statewide average accident rates, accident severity, and identifiable accident patterns; and
- Rehabilitate or replace the pavement, drainage system, and lighting.

To satisfy the project purpose, objectives, and needs, a reasonable alternative must provide geometric, infrastructure, and operational improvements while maintaining both local connectivity and a critical transportation link between I-190 and NYS Route 33. It must also make NYS Route 198 more compatible with adjacent land uses.

During preliminary design, a single reasonable alternative was progressed. Consideration was also given to many different individual features (options) based on public comments, stakeholder input,

coordination with multiple agencies, and engineering studies. The Build Alternative selected for detailed study is the result of significant study and collaboration and is described later in the report.

3. Landscape Districts

Existing Visual Conditions

The project spans from the overpass of Scajaquada Creek on the west side to Main Street on the east side. The western limits of the project area consist of aged industrial sites with large buildings (some are vacant or underutilized) and large expanses of parking lots. Much of the expressway is bounded on the north by the Scajaquada Creek and its heavily vegetated banks, providing a dense screen to land uses to the north. South of the creek lies the developed campus of Buffalo State with its tall residence buildings paralleling the expressway. From Elmwood Avenue east to Parkside Avenue, the expressway runs through Delaware Park, Buffalo's largest Olmsted-design park, and Forest Lawn Cemetery. These two facilities combine to create a pastoral, rural landscape on the northern side of the City of Buffalo. From Parkside Avenue to Main Street, the expressway passes within a dense neighborhood of 2-story turn-of-the-century homes to its union with NYS Route 33.

The project area is located within the Erie-Ontario lake plain physiographic province. This province is a product of Pleistocene glaciation, and glacial deposits are found in undisturbed areas. The local landscape consists of a nearly level post-glacial lake plain marked by stream action (Scajaquada Creek) and the limestone Onondaga Escarpment. Elevations above mean sea level in the project area range from 183-192 m (600-630 ft.). The Scajaquada Expressway corridor traverses a diverse landscape, from highly developed old industrial sites at its western end to its well-maintained pastoral setting of Delaware Park and Forest Lawn Cemetery at its eastern limits, that links the Black Rock Canal waterfront (adjacent to I-190) to NYS Route 33 in northeast Buffalo.

The visual impact assessment (VIA) identified four landscape districts within the project limits, each with a distinct visual character. The visual character and visually sensitive resources within each of these districts are described in more detail below. Identification of these districts provides a framework for visual assessment of the changes to the visual environment of the proposed alternative. Major viewer groups within the corridor were also identified. The exposure level of each group and their sensitivity to changes were determined within each existing viewshed. Prominent features, vistas or visual resources within the existing environment were identified. An aerial photograph depicts the four landscape districts along the project corridor and the specific visual resources within each one. See Figure 3, Landscape Districts.

Landscape District A: Scajaquada Creek Overpass to Grant Street

Landscape District A is located at the westernmost section of the Scajaquada Expressway corridor Project. It extends from the bridge over the Scajaquada Creek easterly to the overhead bridge that carries Grant Street. This district consists of both functioning and abandoned industrial and commercial properties flanking the expressway. To the south this landscape consists of large, level, aged industrial sites with expansive asphalt parking lots adjacent to the expressway ROW. To the north is the heavily vegetated downward sloping embankment of Scajaquada Creek that parallels the expressway to Grant Street. The creek edge consists of a continuous band of mature height vegetation against the ROW edge from the bridge crossing to Grant Street. This provides an effective screen that blocks views to the north. Due to its lower elevation and heavily vegetated bank, the creek is not visible to the motorist on the expressway corridor. The twin towers of the Church of the Assumption, located on the elevated north side of the Scajaquada just east of Grant Street, are a major visual landmark for motorists eastbound and westbound on the expressway. In the vicinity of

the Grant Street overpass bridge, the expressway opens up visually due to the presence of the south side entrance and exit ramps with their associated mowed lawn and additional roadway pavement, reinforcing the expressway feel to this section of the Scajaquada.

For travelers on the Scajaquada Expressway, the foreground roadway is linear. The center median guide rail together with the flanking guide rail emphasizes the linear quality of the roadway. Billboards, light poles, and overhead sign structures are highly visible, vertical elements in the landscape. To the south, adjacent to the roadway, occasional overgrown vegetation on the fencing along the ROW contributes to the aged and poorly maintained industrial character of the corridor. The background views to the industrial properties and parking lots are generally lacking relief from the vast expanse of pavement and roadway structure. From the roadway, travelers' long distance views of the vegetated horizon and skyline are the predominant view as they approach the project area from the west.

Properties in this district include the former FedCo and Fort Knox facilities; several abandoned former industrial sites including the vacant Sherwin-Williams brownfield site; a functioning pharmaceutical facility; the City of Buffalo car impound; a Tops grocery store plaza; and a mixed use residential and minor commercial area. Key visual elements in this district include views of the Church of the Assumption twin spires, the continuous band of vegetation along the north edge of the expressway, and the Grant Street Bridge.

Landscape District B: Grant Street to Elmwood Avenue

Landscape District B is contiguous with Landscape District A and located to its east. The western limit of this district is the Grant Street bridge overpass and the eastern limit is the Elmwood Avenue bridge overpass. Immediately to the north and east of the Grant Street Bridge are several buildings, including the Polish Cadets Club, the Church of the Assumption and Our Lady of Black Rock School. The twin towers of the church and the brick structure of the school are the major prominent visual built elements contrasted against the vegetated creek bank. South of these structures are the Scajaquada Creek and the Jesse Kregal Pathway, which are only partially visible through the heavily vegetated banks. North of the roadway is a narrow embankment that slopes down to Scajaquada Creek. The slope is covered with dense vegetation. Mixed-use commercial structures and a few residences border the creek but are not visible from the roadway due to the vegetated creek edge. McKinley High School is located above an open slope directly north of Scajaquada Creek west of Elmwood Avenue. The school's open turf ball fields and creek edge interface are partially visible from the expressway prior to Elmwood Avenue's entrance and exit ramps.

The campus of Buffalo State College occupies the southern portion of this district. The campus includes an athletic complex on the far west, residence halls, academic buildings, parking lots and Rockwell Hall, whose tower is visible and a visual landmark from the Scajaquada Expressway within this district. The four Scajaquada Tower residence halls that are near and parallel to the roadway are the most visible campus structures from the expressway. Between the campus and the expressway a campus ring road (Iroquois Drive) separates the college from the expressway. Iroquois Drive is level with the expressway at its western end. In the center portion of this district, a smooth concrete retaining wall is located between the roadway and Iroquois Drive where there is limited horizontal clearance between the roadway and Iroquois Drive. Further east the retaining wall abruptly ends at a chain link fence that is mostly hidden from the expressway due to a large vegetated slope separating Iroquois Drive and the campus from the expressway. Surrounding the Elmwood Avenue Bridge are: the Elmwood Village district, the historic Museum district, and Delaware Park.

The roadway is a visually dominant element of the landscape for motorists and campus residents. The center median guide rail and the guide rail flanking the north side of the expressway are present and emphasize the highway character and linear nature of the roadway. The expressway has a straight linear section in its westernmost portion and a reverse-curve in the central and east portion of this section. Entrance and exit ramps to and from Elmwood Avenue intersect with the roadway. The high speed ramp intersections contribute to the visual perception of the roadway as a high speed urban arterial roadway.

On the south, the sloped embankment up to Iroquois Drive is covered with naturalized understory vegetation and some trees and some eroded landscape. In front of the retaining wall is unmanaged roadside vegetation common to disturbed sites that are unmowed and unkempt.

Landscape District C: Elmwood Avenue to Parkside Avenue

Landscape District C is contiguous with Landscape District B and is located just to its east. This district is comprised of Delaware Park and Forest Lawn Cemetery with their pastoral landscapes, the Park Maintenance Facility building, and parking lot. At the eastern edge of the district is Agassiz Circle and Parkside Avenue. Agassiz Circle and Delaware Park are historic resources designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Within Delaware Park, north of the Scajaquada Expressway is the level Great Meadow, dotted with its large specimen trees and surrounded by the park ring road and an active shared use path. A new timber-faced iron guide rail skirts the north side of the Scajaquada Expressway, separating it from the park and adjacent ring road.

South of the Scajaquada Expressway lies the rolling topography of Forest Lawn Cemetery. This National Register listed cemetery features dramatic historic monuments and a classical landscape with numerous gardens and mature specimen trees. The Parks Maintenance Facility and adjoining Delaware Park Labor Center's maintenance garages and parking lots are situated to the south of the Scajaquada Expressway. Both buildings are deteriorated one story cinderblock and brick structures that lack aesthetic quality and due to their appearance and location, detract from the pastoral aesthetic of the area and block views of the cemetery grounds. They contrast with the otherwise expansive, natural pastoral surroundings.

From a traveler's perspective, the gentle curvature of the Scajaquada Expressway provides changing viewpoints of the adjacent park and cemetery. The relatively flat and uniform texture of the roadway and adjacent parkland results in a unified landscape, although many elements appear inconsistent and disorderly with the character of the pastoral landscape such as the Park Maintenance Facility, the radio tower and tennis courts located close to the roadway, and the rusty double-sided center median guide rail.

In the western portion of this landscape district Hoyt and Mirror Lakes, several works of art (a reproduction of Michelangelo's David and The Spirit of Womanhood, by Larry W. Griffis, Jr.), and several significant historic buildings (the Buffalo History Museum, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Marcy Casino) come into view adding a richness of detail, complexity, and variety to the landscape. The curvilinear alignment of the Scajaquada Expressway echoes the undulating curvature of the adjacent landscape and also serves to obscure some views of the pavement for travelers on the roadway. In some areas the roadway curvature partially obscures some of the landscape vertical elements, such as light poles, overhead sign structures, and pedestrian overpass stair towers. In other locations, the adjacent vegetation also enframes views of Hoyt Lake. This segment of the corridor exhibits a variety of vegetation types and heights, a balance of open areas and enclosures and detailed man-made elements and focal points expressed in the artwork, cemetery structures, and the adjacent significant historic buildings.

Landscape District D: Parkside Avenue to Main Street

Landscape District D is contiguous with Landscape District C and is located just to its east. This is the easternmost district of the project. The westernmost edge of this district forms the border between the surrounding Parkside neighborhood and Delaware Park. At Parkside Avenue, 2-1/2 story residences typify the neighborhood to the east and characterize the abrupt change in adjacent land use from expansive parkland to dense, turn-of-the-century house lined neighborhood streets. The expressway quickly changes in grade as NYS Route 198 descends and passes beneath Main Street. The vertical retaining walls flanking the depressed roadway are faced with heavily rusticated natural limestone. The narrow paved median of NYS Route 198 contains a double-sided corrugated W-beam guide rail that is in contrast visually with the natural stone surroundings.

The depressed expressway severs the Canisius College campus from the residential neighborhood to the north. There are commercial structures and high-rise residential units adjacent to Main Street.

NYS Route 198 and the at-grade access roadways on either side of the depressed section combine to create a visual landscape heavily dominated by wide roadways, roadway infrastructure, and motor vehicles. The roadway and flanking stone walls provide strong linear and geometric elements within this visual landscape. Color is monochromatic in the concrete and stone structures but highly textured with the natural stone walls. The at-grade bordering vegetation and residential and commercial structures are not tall enough to compensate for the wide expanse of roadway and contribute minimally to a sense of enclosure typically found in the house-lined neighborhood streets. The roadway infrastructure of bridges, guide rail, light poles, and overhead sign structures together with the wide expanse of multi-lane roadway are the dominant visual elements in stark contrast to the typical neighborhood tree and house lined street or the pastoral landscape of Delaware Park.

4. Build Alternative

Alternative 2: Boulevard Alternative (Build Alternative)

Alternative 2: the Boulevard Alternative is the only build alternative being considered in this DEIS. To improve compatibility of the roadway with the park and adjacent land uses, and to address the geometric and operational deficiencies, the Build Alternative would convert the Scajaquada Expressway from an urban expressway into an urban boulevard. This would be accomplished by constructing two (2) travel lanes in each direction between Grant Street and Parkside Avenue along the roadway's current alignment. Ramps at Grant Street, Elmwood Avenue, and Delaware Avenue would be replaced with connecting roadways. Intersections with traffic control (stop signs, signals, or roundabouts) would be constructed where each connecting roadway meets NYS Route 198. Parkside Avenue would remain a signalized intersection. A new intersection would be created at the entrance to the Buffalo Parks Maintenance Facility.

Upon project completion, the NYSDOT would pursue changing the functional classification of the Scajaquada Expressway (NYS Route 198) from an Urban Principal Expressway to an Urban Minor Arterial. The Boulevard Alternative would provide accommodations for motor vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The design would conform to accepted standards for an urban minor arterial. The project would increase pedestrian and bicyclist accessibility and would promote safety for all users. Several new pedestrian and bicyclist crossing opportunities would be created between Grant Street and Elmwood Avenue, at Elmwood Avenue, between Iroquois Drive and Mirror Lake, at Delaware Avenue, between Delaware Avenue and Parkside Avenue, and at Parkside Avenue.

Highlights of the Boulevard Alternative include:

- Reconstruction.
- Conversion of 2.2 mi of the Scajaquada Expressway into an urban boulevard from the Grant Street interchange to Parkside Avenue.
- Construction of two 11-foot wide travel lanes in each direction.
- Separation of eastbound and westbound traffic with a 14-foot wide (typical), two-tier median (measured from yellow line to yellow line). The lower tier would be a 6" vertical-faced (barrier) curb with a one-foot offset to a similar upper tier curb that edges the landscaped median. The median would become wider at pedestrian crossings, narrower on some intersection approaches, and be eliminated on the bridge over Delaware Avenue.
- Installation of curb along both sides of each roadway. Curb offsets would be one-foot wide on the left (adjacent to the two-tiered median when present) and three feet on the right to accommodate snow storage, drainage structures, and bicyclists once the road is reclassified.
- Removal of the existing ramps at the Grant Street, Elmwood Avenue, and Delaware Avenue interchanges and replacement with connector (quadrant) roadways. The grade separations (overpasses) would remain.
- Construction of a modern roundabout at the intersection of the Scajaquada Expressway and the southern Grant Street connector that will become a gateway for the corridor.
- Installation of a new intersection providing access to both eastbound and westbound Scajaquada Expressway at the entrance to the Buffalo Parks Maintenance Facility.
- Retention of the existing (at-grade) Parkside Avenue intersection with improvements to the alignment and safety. Changes may include the elimination of westbound and southbound turning roadways (slip lanes).
- Maintenance of the existing horizontal and vertical alignments of the existing facility to the greatest extent feasible; addition of horizontal curvature between the pedestrian overpass and Delaware Avenue to reflect the historic alignment of a bridal path that predated the Scajaquada Expressway and to promote traffic calming.
- Retention of the existing posted speed limit of 30 mph from Grant Street to Parkside Avenue. Speed transition zones would be developed on the viaduct and between Parkside Avenue and NYS Route 33 under separate projects.
- Installation of new traffic signals where the Scajaquada Expressway meets the northern Grant Street Connector, Elmwood Avenue Connector, southern Lincoln Parkway Connector, Delaware Avenue Connector, and at the Buffalo Parks Maintenance Facility.
- Installation of three-color signals at four new mid-block crossing locations near Buffalo State, Mirror Lake, Hoyt Lake, and Delaware Park, resulting in a signal spacing of approximately 900 feet to benefit coordination.

- Removal of bridges carrying Ramps GE and GF over Scajaquada Creek and construction of a new structure for the proposed Grant Street connector roadway.

- Construction of three raised table intersections on NYS Route 198 at the Elmwood Avenue Connector, Delaware Avenue Connector, and Parkside Avenue, in addition to raised pedestrian and bicycle crossings at additional locations along the corridor.

- Removal of the bridge carrying Ramps EB and ED over Scajaquada Creek and construction of a new structure for the proposed Elmwood Connector roadway. Also removal of BIN 1039970, Elmwood Avenue Ramp EK over Scajaquada Creek.

- Rehabilitation of the bridge (minor concrete substructure repairs) carrying Lincoln Parkway over Scajaquada Creek (The Three Tribes Bridge, Ramp LJ). Addition of angled back-in parking for park and museum patrons.

- Modification of the roadway on the bridge carrying the Scajaquada Expressway over Delaware Avenue to accommodate a new roadway, path, and sidewalk configuration.

- Construction of two (2) new shared-use path bridges over Scajaquada Creek: one at the Buffalo State College crossing and one just west of Mirror Lake.

- Construction of one (1) new large-scale retaining wall to allow for shared use path construction adjacent to Scajaquada Creek. Construction of additional lower-scale retaining walls as needed.

- Installation of new, signalized, raised pedestrian and bicycle crossings of NYS Route 198.

- Installation of new 10-foot wide shared-use paths and five-foot wide foot paths at several locations along the Scajaquada Expressway from Grant Street to Parkside Avenue. Where possible, new paths would follow the historic alignments of original paths within Delaware Park.

- Development of new connections to the Jesse Kregal Pathway and other shared-use paths within Delaware Park, resulting in a separate, parallel, off-roadway system for pedestrian and bicyclist accommodation throughout the project limits.

- Construction of a shared roadway (14 ft wide shared surface consisting of an 11 ft wide travel lane adjacent to a 3 ft wide curb offset) that would allow bicyclists identifying as “strong and fearless” or “enthused and confident” (from the City of Buffalo’s Bicycle Master Plan Update) to share the road with motor vehicles between Grant Street and Parkside Avenue.

- Removal of existing overhead guide signs, overhead sign structures, and any other remaining expressway-scale guide signs and replacement with appropriate, arterial-scale signing in accordance with MUTCD standards.

5. Regulatory Context

Delaware Park, a 376-acre tract of land, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a component of the Delaware Park-Front Park System, an element of the Olmsted Parks and Parkway Thematic Resources in the City of Buffalo, Erie County. The Scajaquada Expressway, constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, follows the roadbed of a former park drive along an east-west alignment through the park. The roadway of the Scajaquada Expressway (Route 198) within Delaware Park is considered a non-contributing structure.

In 1986, the Parkside East and Parkside West Historic Districts were nominated to the National Register as additional components of the Olmsted Parks and Parkways Thematic Resources.
As a park listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is subject to:

- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966;
- Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966; and
- Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act

There would be impacts to the park resulting from this project, however those impacts would not affect any visual resources. Refer to Chapter 4 of the Design Report for additional information.

There are no State Wild, Scenic or Recreational Rivers within or adjacent to the proposed project site. Therefore, the Build Alternative would have no effect on NYSDEC Designated, Study or Inventory State Wild, Scenic or Recreational Rivers Act.

There are no National Wild or Scenic Rivers in the project area. Therefore, the project would have no effect on a National Wild or Scenic River.

According to lists of State Critical Environmental Areas on the NYSDEC website, there are no Critical Environmental Areas designated within the City of Buffalo. Therefore, the project would have no effect on Critical Environmental Areas.

6. Affected Population

Viewer Groups:
To assess viewer responses to changes in the visual environment, general viewer groups have been identified. There are two distinct groups of viewers: neighbors and travelers. Neighbors are those people who are adjacent to the project and have views of the road. Travelers are those who are using the expressway and have views from the road. Neighbors have been further subdivided into: residential neighbors (those who live adjacent to the project area); recreational neighbors (park and trail users); and institutional neighbors (museum and college patrons).

Viewer sensitivity depends upon viewer activity, exposure, and awareness as well as viewing frequency. Each of these factors can influence how a viewer group may respond to changes in the visual environment.

Travelers: Motorists
Motorists view the project from the road, typically in a dynamic mode (i.e. moving at typical vehicular traveling speeds). This viewer group consists of motorists traveling the length of the project corridor on the Scajaquada Expressway or using it to access or egress destinations within

the project area. At the western end of the project area, motorists are viewing the roadway and surrounding landscape from an elevated perspective. Their viewpoint transitions to an at-grade viewer perspective which extends for most of the length of the project area. Within the center of the corridor, the pastoral landscape characteristic of Delaware Park, Forest Lawn Cemetery, and the adjacent lakes provides an aesthetically pleasant experience while traveling through the area. Motorists generally travel at speeds at or around the 30 mph posted speed limit of the Scajaquada Expressway. Viewer exposure is high due to the number of highway users and trips. Viewer activity consists of either driving or being a passenger in a vehicle. For drivers, viewer awareness may be moderate while for passengers viewer awareness may be high. Motorists traveling in a north-south direction across (perpendicular to) the project area along an active commercial community route (Grant Street, Elmwood Avenue, Delaware Avenue (NYS Route 384), and Main Street (NYS Route 5)) would have low exposure to visual changes in the environment due to limited visibility and short viewer duration within the project area. Therefore, motorists have relatively low sensitivity to detailed visual changes within the corridor.

Neighbors: Residential neighbors:
Several residential areas surround the project area, and therefore there are potentially numerous residents that could be affected. These neighborhoods include the Black Rock and Forest neighborhoods at its western end, the Park Meadow (Nottingham Terrace) and Parkside Avenue neighborhoods, bordering the eastern end of the project corridor, and the Delaware Park and Albright neighborhoods to the south. Neighborhood residents in and around the project corridor have a prolonged, detail-focused view of the roadway and the surrounding landscape. Their exposure level to the area is high. They are also highly sensitive to any visual changes within the project area.

Although many in number, the majority of neighbors surrounding the project area do not have visual access to the project corridor from their residences due to topography or intervening vegetation and structures blocking views. They may be more susceptible to functional and operational impacts from traffic, noise, and air pollution than from actual visual impacts. The neighborhoods with direct visual access to the project corridor include some residents of Nottingham Terrace where the Scajaquada Expressway skirts the northern limits of Delaware Park. This results in a narrow strip of level, open parkland separating Nottingham Terrace from the expressway. A relatively small number of residents on Agassiz Circle, Meadowview Place, and Humboldt Parkway also have views of the expressway within the eastern limits of the project area. Viewer exposure, or the actual affected number of viewers in this viewer group is low, but their sensitivity, viewer frequency, and exposure is high.

Recreational neighbors: Park and Trail Users
Delaware Park and Forest Lawn Cemetery's pastoral landscape occupies more than one half of the project corridor, significantly defining the corridor's and surrounding area's visual aesthetic. The Jesse Kregal Pathway runs from the Black Rock Canal to Delaware Park within the project corridor. Patrons of the park and pathway comprise this viewer group. Park and trail users have the greatest exposure as they travel at a much slower speed, are usually in a recreational mode and therefore more connected to and aware of the visual landscape. This group is less in number than motorists using the corridor but due to their activity, are considered to be the most sensitive to changes in the project area's visual resources.

Institutional Neighbors: College/Museum Patrons
This viewer group consists primarily of Buffalo State College students and employees as the college occupies the western quarter of the project corridor. To a lesser degree, Medaille College

and Canisius College patrons are also an impacted viewer group as those campuses are located at the eastern end of the project corridor. In addition to campus patrons, visitors to the adjacent museums located along the corridor (Albright Knox Gallery, the Buffalo History Museum, Marcy Casino, etc.) are included in this viewer group. Similar to the park and trail users, this viewer group is traveling at slower speeds within vehicles or traveling on bike or foot with interest focused on their surroundings. They have a moderate exposure due to the shorter duration of their visit and therefore a moderate to high sensitivity to visual changes in the environment.

Proposed Visual Conditions

The boulevard alternative's visual features will be selected to advance the goal of creating an urban boulevard. The features will be consistent with the aesthetic of an urban boulevard and will promote traffic calming; the roadway will no longer appear as a high-speed urban expressway.

Roadway width: Each roadway travel lane will be 11 feet wide. High speed entry and exit ramps will be removed and replaced with signalized at-grade quadrant intersections.

Median: A median will separate eastbound and westbound traffic. The median will vary in width. The presence of the median with vertical elements will promote traffic calming. The median will be planted in locations, and in the sections where planting is infeasible, specialty paving will be employed to promote compatibility with the surrounding area. The median will serve to visually break up the expanse of pavement so that the eastbound and westbound traffic lanes will be partially obscured from one another. For drivers and park visitors the vista across the roadway will be interrupted by planting. The median planting will serve to increase visual connectivity between the greenspaces to the north and the south of the roadway. The median will minimize the visibility of the full area of roadway pavement from any vantage point. The median will provide an area for pedestrian refuge for people who are unable to cross in one light cycle, thus enhancing pedestrian safety.
Figure 4, Viewshed Map, illustrates the area of visual effect of the project area. This map depicts the area potentially visible from the viewpoint of the various potential viewer categories at a number of points along the roadway and in the areas of visual effect adjacent to the project.

7. Viewshed and Key Viewpoints

Nine (9) key viewpoints were selected that are representative of the views which are most likely to be affected by the project. These locations were photographed and photo simulations were developed to illustrate the potential changes to area visual resources with the Boulevard Alternative. The locations and directions of these photographs are shown on the Viewpoint Location Map (Figures 5 & 5A). The existing photographs and proposed photo simulations are shown in Figures 6 through 23. The photo simulations were used to aid in the analysis of the Boulevard Alternative.

8. Methodology

Photographs of each viewpoint were obtained using a Canon 350 (Rebel XT) digital SLR camera. The camera utilized a focal length between 28 and 35mm (equivalent to between 45 and 55mm on a standard 35mm camera). This focal length most closely approximates normal human eyesight relative to scale. At each viewpoint, the camera was positioned at an existing surveyed and mapped feature in the project area (i.e. an existing light pole, sign structure, manhole, etc.).

The visual simulations provide clear before and after images of each viewpoint looking at the scale and visual appearance of the features affected by the proposed project. The simulations were developed through an objective analytical and computer modeling process and are accurate within the

constraints of the available site and alternative data. 3D models of each viewpoint were created using a combination of MicroStation and SketchUP, design data, engineering drawings, elevations and cross sections. Site and topographical contour plans, concept diagrams and reference pictures were used as a platform from which the digital models were created. Snapshot images corresponding to the photographed viewpoints were taken from the models of the proposed improvements and superimposed onto the photos using common reference points (tight poles, manholes, etc.) in the models and the photographs.

9. Assessment of Impacts

Impacts to Landscape District A – Scajaquada Creek Overpass to Grant Street – *(Viewpoint 1, Boulevard Alternative 2):*

A new center median, a roundabout and new landscaping will be introduced. The visual prominence of the roadway pavement will be reduced due to the construction of a landscaped median and street tree plantings along with decoratively paved splitter islands. Ornamental lighting consistent with the park environment and a boulevard will replace existing highway lighting. The overall quantity of pavement will be reduced and the center corrugated W-beam guiderail, which is characteristic of a high-speed expressway, will be removed and replaced with a decorative and functional planted median. Side slope grading and selective clearing will improve the quality of the landscape and improve opportunities to view Scajaquada Creek and the Jesse Kregal Pathway from both the roadway and the pedestrian walkways. Positive views can be better framed, further increasing the visual quality of this segment of the corridor. Undesirable, invasive plants will be cleared from the landscape in these areas. These elements will add variety and texture to an otherwise expansive stretch of corridor that lacks detail and foreground texture.

The proposed improvements will result in beneficial visual impacts for all viewer groups.

Viewpoint 1

Viewpoint 1 was taken at the west end of the project corridor, west of the Grant Street Bridge, looking east. Figure 6 shows existing conditions.

The proposed view is shown in Figure 7. This viewpoint shows the new center median, the roundabout and landscaping and the effect of the proposed improvements. The curbed splitter islands and center median lend a more orderly look to the corridor than the high speed expressway ramps. This viewpoint is taken from the perspective of a motorist exiting the boulevard to Grant Street.

Impacts to Landscape District B – Grant Street to Elmwood Avenue – (Viewpoints 2, 3, 4A, Boulevard Alternative 2):

In Landscape District B, there is a wide expanse of pavement that comprises the two-lane westbound roadway and exit ramp, with a center corrugated W-beam median barrier. The project would eliminate the westbound Grant Street exit ramp and replace it with a signalized intersection, typical of a local roadway. A landscaped center median would be installed. There would be an increase in overall green space resulting from the removal of the high-speed westbound exit and entry ramps and installation of the center landscape median. Ornamental light poles in conjunction with the proposed street tree plantings would add texture, pattern, vertical elements and enclosure, framing and reducing linear views of the roadway. The curbed center median would also visually reduce the boulevard by blocking views of the oncoming traffic lanes, making it appear more harmonious with the surrounding landscape.

The proposed improvements would result in beneficial visual changes for all viewer groups.

Viewpoint 2

Figure 8 (existing Viewpoint 2) was taken just east of the westbound Scajaquada Expressway exit to Grant Street. Figure 8 shows existing conditions while Figure 9 illustrates the proposed conditions with the Boulevard Alternative. This view shows the elimination of the westbound Grant Street exit ramp and construction of a new signalized intersection with a landscaped center median. There would be an increase in overall green space resulting from the elimination of the high speed exit ramp and shoulder, and the addition of the center median in the roadway pavement. The regularly spaced ornamental light poles in conjunction with the proposed median landscaping and curbing would provide edge definition and add texture, pattern, that currently does not exist. Opportunities for selective clearing of the Scajaquada Creek bank would provide additional interest and richness of visual resources to the corridor. This viewpoint approximately represents the perspective of a motorist traveling westbound along the boulevard.

The proposed improvements for Alternative 2 would result in beneficial visual changes for all viewer groups.

Viewpoint 3

Viewpoint 3 (Figure 10) was taken approximately midway between Grant Street and the proposed Elmwood Connector, looking west at the new mid-block pedestrian crossing to the Buffalo State College campus. Figure 10 shows existing conditions. Existing views are open to Buffalo State College to the south and the vegetated edges of the corridor and Scajaquada Creek to the north.

Figure 11 shows proposed conditions with the Boulevard Alternative. This figure depicts the elimination of the wide paved shoulder, which significantly reduces the visual dominance of the roadway. The new two-tiered, landscaped median will also reduce the roadway's dominance, As illustrated in other viewpoints, the addition of lighting and median landscaping would provide stronger edge definition and pattern detail for the corridor.

The proposed improvements for Alternative 2 would result in beneficial visual changes for all viewer groups.

Viewpoint 4A

Viewpoint 4A (Figure 12) was taken from the Elmwood Avenue overpass (currently under reconstruction), looking west/northwest toward NYS Route 198 and Scajaquada Creek. With the proposed narrowing and new landscaped median, this viewpoint (Figure 13) illustrates how the proposed alternative would significantly change the roadway character within the corridor. The separation of the eastbound and westbound travel lanes by the wider, two-tiered landscaped median would reduce the visual dominance of the roadway. The proposed median landscaping, street trees and ornamental lighting add foreground and mid-ground detail, texture, and rhythm, contributing to a more orderly composition. The replacement of the Elmwood Avenue bridge is currently under construction in an historically appropriate style and is being reconstructed under a separate project.

The proposed improvements would result in a beneficial change for all viewer groups.

Impacts to Landscape District C – Elmwood Avenue to Parkside Avenue – (Viewpoints 5, 5A, 6, 7, 8, Boulevard Alternative 2):

Landscape District C, from Elmwood Avenue to Parkside Avenue, encompasses the entire Delaware Park and Forest Lawn Cemetery landscape that surrounds the Scajaquada Expressway. Within this district the current configuration of the expressway is at odds with the pastoral and scenic setting of the park. The wide expanse of roadway, the clover-leaf exit and entry ramps, long approach ramps, wide shoulders and other high-speed expressway elements would be replaced with roadway features consistent with an urban arterial. The center corrugated W-beam median barrier will be replaced with a two-tiered landscaped median, dividing the roadway into two travel lanes in each direction. The project would replace the clover-leaf entry/exit ramps with signalized intersections typical of a local roadway. Ornamental light poles in conjunction with the proposed street tree plantings would add texture, pattern, and order, framing and reducing linear views of the roadway. The curbed center median would also visually reduce the boulevard by blocking views of the oncoming traffic lanes as well as minimizing views of the roadway from the park and trail users. These changes would be more consistent and harmonious with the adjacent pastoral landscape.

Viewpoint 5

Viewpoint 5 (Figure 14) was taken approximately midway between Elmwood Avenue and Lincoln Parkway, adjacent to Mirror Lake looking west. In this view the roadway pavement consists of a three-lane westbound section with paved shoulder, corrugated W-beam center guide rail, and an overhead sign structure. These highway infrastructure elements are the dominant visual features within this scenic section of Delaware Park.

The proposed improvements (Figure 15) would eliminate the westbound off-ramp and introduce a multi-use path in its place. A two-tiered curbed, planted center median would also be added between the eastbound and westbound travel lanes, minimizing the expanse and dominance of roadway asphalt. This would result in minimizing the visibility of the roadway pavement by providing planting in the median, contributing to traffic calming and increasing surrounding greenspace. The proposed median landscaping, ornamental light poles, and new railing would provide a greater degree of texture and detail for the foreground and mid-ground. The large overhead sign will also be removed, further contributing to the scaled-down feel of the roadway from a high-speed expressway to park boulevard, creating a more harmonious landscape consistent with the visual resources of Delaware Park.

The proposed roadway improvements would result in a beneficial change to the visual environment for all user groups.

Viewpoint 5A

Viewpoint 5A (Figure 16) was taken from the existing pedestrian overpass just east of Mirror Lake looking west. Figure 17 illustrates the elimination of auxiliary lanes in both the eastbound and westbound directions, shoulder narrowing, the removal of the center corrugated W-beam guiderail, and the introduction of curbing and a two-tiered landscaped median. These improvements would significantly reduce the visual dominance of the paved roadway. Ornamental light poles and proposed median plantings would add foreground texture, pattern, vertical elements and an ordered appearance to the roadway.

The proposed improvements would result in a beneficial visual impact for all viewer groups.

Viewpoint 6

Viewpoint 6 (Figure 18) was taken from Delaware Avenue (NYS Route 384) looking northerly towards the NYS Route 198 overpass within Delaware Park. The proposed view (Figure 19)

illustrates a new signal at the Delaware Avenue Connector and the elimination of the existing entrance/exit ramps.

The proposed improvements would result in minimal changes to the visual environment from this viewpoint. The visual proportion of roadway to greenspace will remain essentially the same. While some pavement area is reduced, it is widened in other areas to accommodate the turning lanes. The removal of high speed highway elements is harmonious with the existing Delaware Park and Forest Lawn landscape.

The proposed improvements will result in minimal but positive changes to the visual environment for all viewer groups.

Viewpoint 7
Viewpoint 7 (Figure 20) was taken from the steps of the Albright Knox Art Gallery, looking north/northeasterly towards the Lincoln Parkway Bridge over Hoyt Lake.

The proposed improvements (Figure 21) show the conversion of the bridge from a wide, undifferentiated vehicular use to a combination parking area and access road to the boulevard. The perceived mid-ground expanse of asphalt pavement is reduced from the existing, replaced by parked cars and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle crossings.

The proposed improvements would result in minimal impact to the motorist and resident viewer groups due to their limited visibility of this area of the project corridor. Park and trail and college/museum patron viewer groups will experience a landscape more consistent with the surrounding land uses.

Viewpoint 8
Viewpoint 8 (Figure 22) was taken just east of the Delaware Avenue overpass looking easterly along NYS Route 198 towards Delaware Park. The current view shows the two-lane eastbound and westbound roadways with the narrow center corrugated W-beam median barrier and the off ramp to Delaware Avenue northbound. The park ring road and Great Meadow area with its large specimen trees are visible in the background.

The proposed view (Figure 23) illustrates a new signalized intersection, removal of the interchange ramps, and the introduction of a new two-tiered curbed landscaped median separating the eastbound and westbound travel lanes. The northernmost westbound travel lane is separated from the surrounding landscape by a low profile concrete barrier. A new paved area would be added to the eastbound lane resulting from a new exclusive right turn lane. New greenspace would be introduced in the median. The two-tiered landscaped median would partially block views of the westbound travel lanes, further reducing the amount of visible pavement. The proposed street trees and ornamental lighting would add a degree of foreground texture to the visual environment.

The proposed improvements would result in beneficial impacts to the visual environment for all user groups.

10. Mitigation

Construction of the Boulevard Alternative would alter the visual character of the project corridor. These changes would largely be beneficial due to the reduction of pavement areas, narrowed

shoulders, elimination of ramps, introduction of signalized intersections and High Intensity Activated Crosswalk Beacons (HAWK) signals; the introduction of landscaped median and pedestrian refuge areas, improvements to pedestrian pathways and bicyclist's paths. A variety of design techniques could be employed to further minimize any localized adverse impacts. The following is a list of potential mitigation measures during the final design and construction stages:

- Provide plantings as visual buffers to soften new structural features and hardscapes.
- Provide visual buffer plantings on slopes as practicable in and around new signalized intersections.
- Eliminate all roadway design features that relate to the high speed nature of the original expressway function and replace them with features or infrastructure more appropriate to an urban arterial roadway classification, as needed.
- Maintain as much existing vegetation as is practical during construction, especially on the steep slope areas and adjacent to Delaware Park and Forest Lawn Cemetery.
- Replace lost plantings and other park features that were lost from the original Scajaquada Expressway installation, especially within the Scajaquada Expressway corridor, entrance and exit ramps, and through Delaware Park.
- Provide context-appropriate enhancements especially within the limits of Delaware Park. Examples of appropriate enhancements include historically-compatible railing treatments and colors, historically compatible pavement surfaces for new trails and pathways, historically appropriate materials for replacement of lost park features, and the use of historic plant species and replacements located in original locations as practical.

11. Summary

The nature of the proposed project and the accompanying physical changes would serve to visually transform this urban expressway originally designed for high-speed capacity into an urban boulevard consistent with the character and aesthetic of an urban boulevard, compatible with the adjoining landscape. The proposed action would result in a significant beneficial change to the visual quality of the project area for all viewer groups, bringing the facility into greater harmony and order with the surrounding community character and natural environment.

12. References

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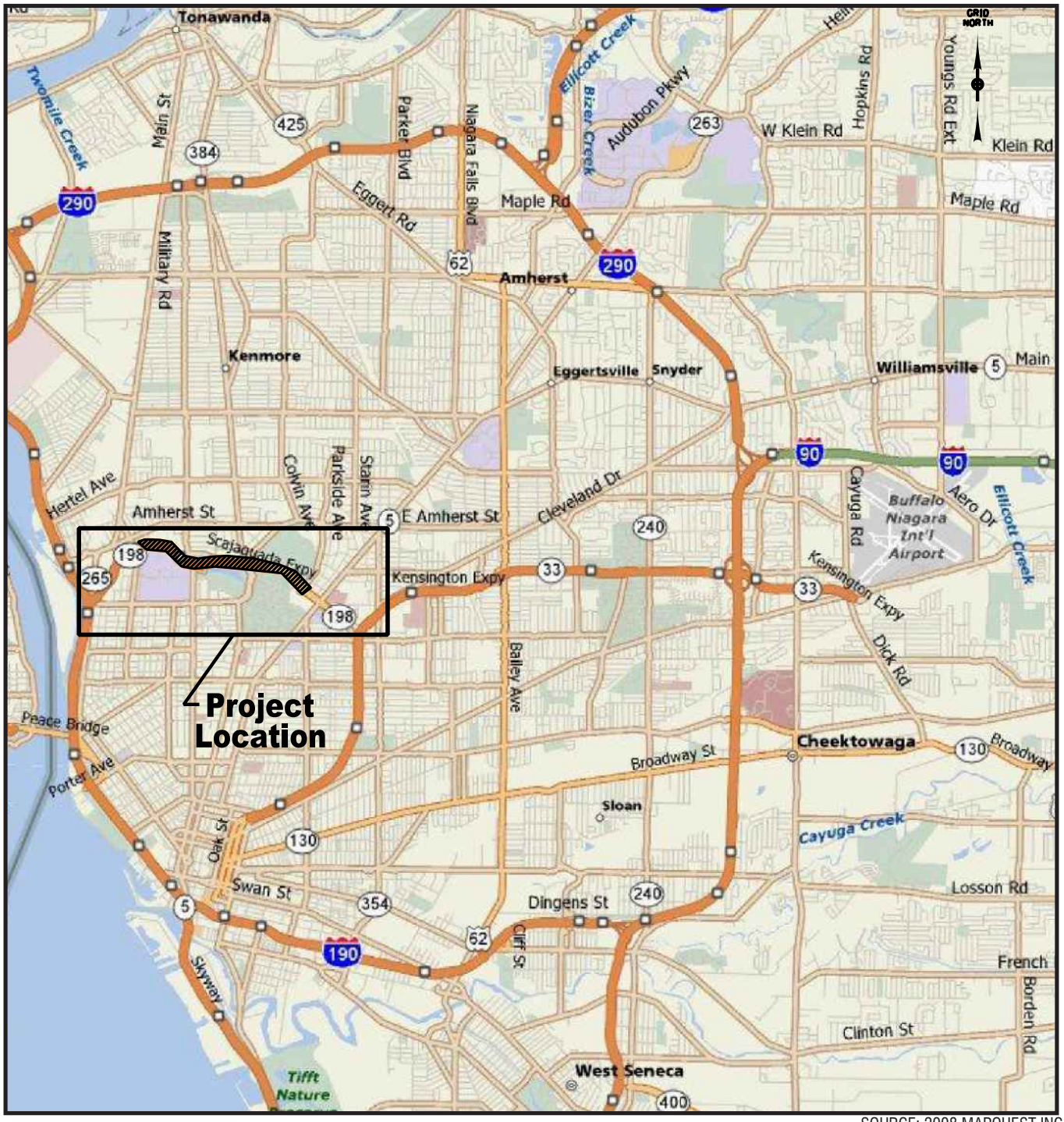

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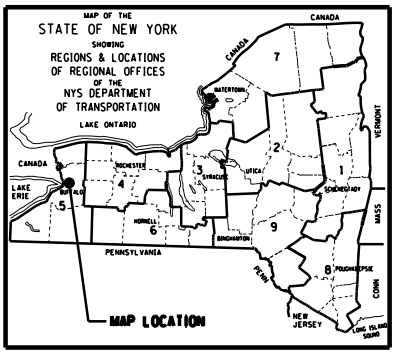

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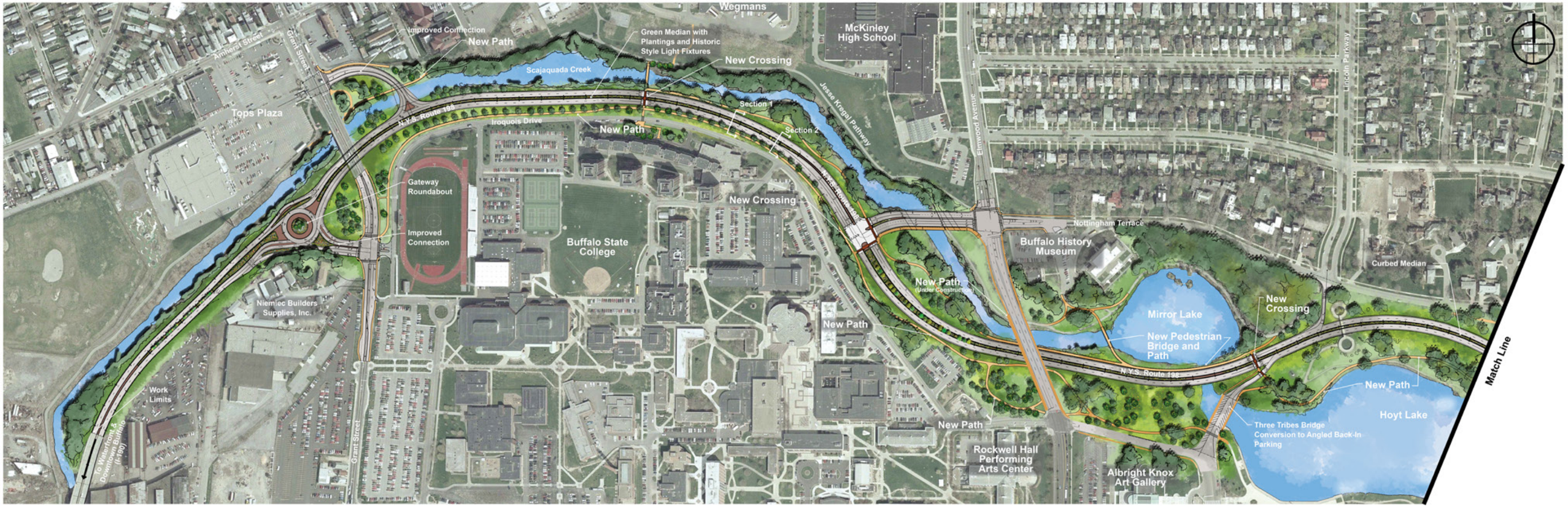
PROJECT LOCATION MAP | **FIGURE 1**



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ALTERNATIVE 2: BOULEVARD (BUILD ALTERNATIVE) - WEST | **FIGURE 2**

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ALTERNATIVE 2: BOULEVARD (BUILD ALTERNATIVE) - EAST | **FIGURE 2A**

KEY VISUAL ELEMENTS

100 0 100 200 300 400 500 m
SCALE

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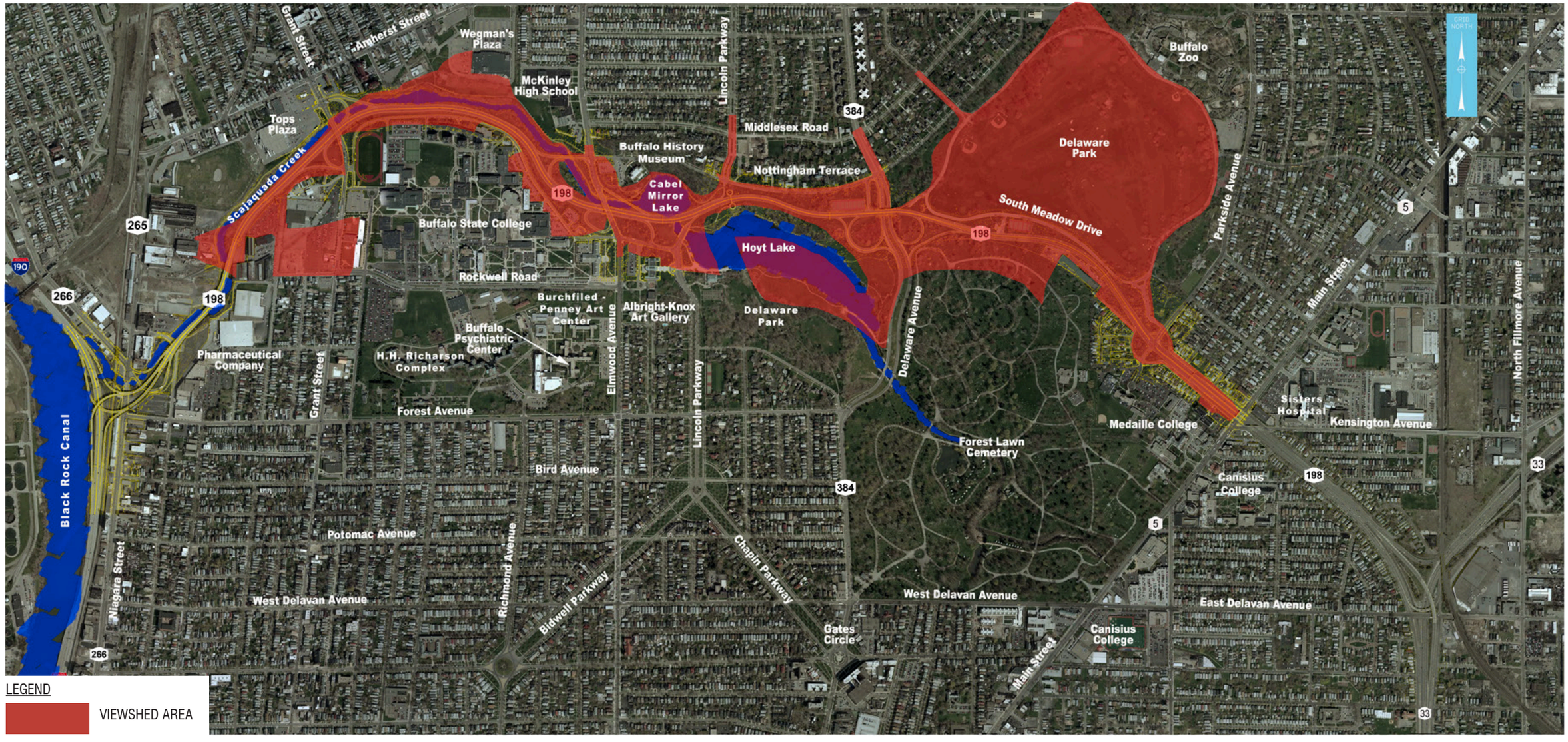
LANDSCAPE DISTRICTS | **FIGURE 3**



LEGEND

VIEWSHED AREA

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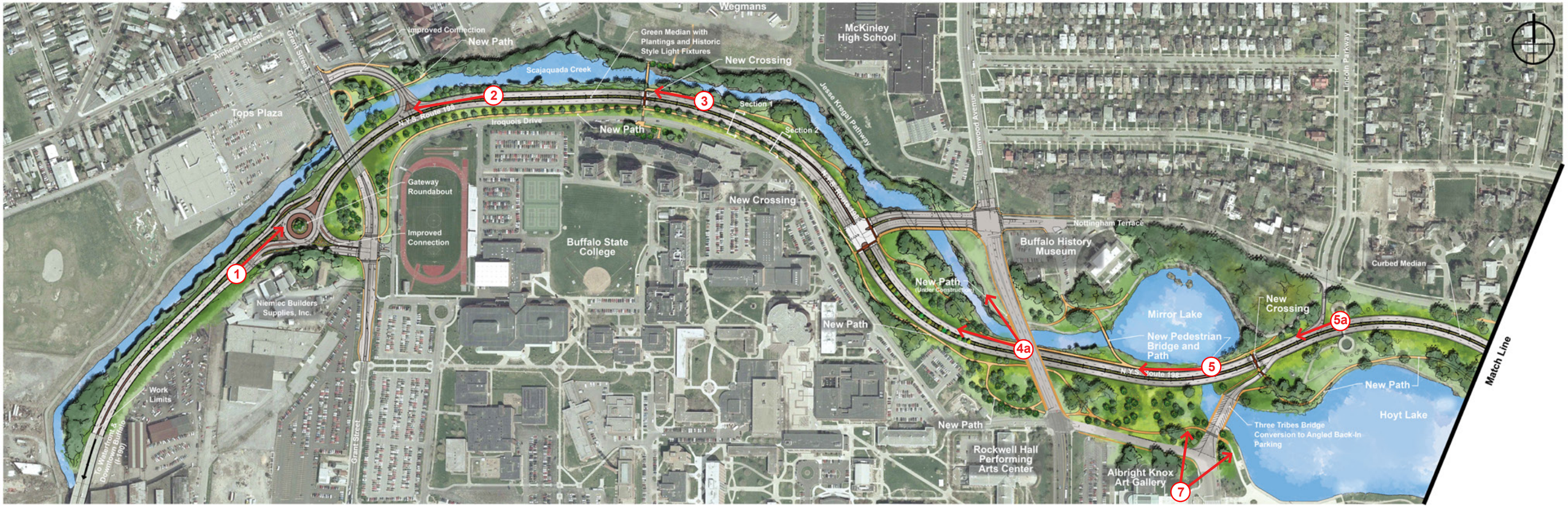
VIEWSHED MAP | **FIGURE 4**



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VIEWPOINT LOCATION MAP WEST | **FIGURE 5**

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VIEWPOINT LOCATION MAP EAST | **FIGURE 5A**

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Landscape District A | Looking East Towards Grant Street Bridge | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 1 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 6**

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Landscape District A | Looking East Towards Grant Street Bridge | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 1 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 7**

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Landscape District B | Looking West Towards Grant Street Bridge | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 2 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 8**

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Landscape District B | Looking West Towards Grant Street Bridge | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 2 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 9**

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Landscape District B | North of Buffalo State Campus Looking West | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 3 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 10**

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Landscape District B | North of Buffalo State Campus Looking West | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 3 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 11**

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NYS ROUTE 198 | THE SCAJAQUADA PROJECT

Landscape District B | From Elmwood Ave Bridge Looking West | Residential Neighbor, Park and Trail, and College / Museum Viewer Groups

VIEWPOINT 4A - EXISTING | **FIGURE 12**

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Landscape District B | From Elmwood Ave Bridge Looking West | Residential Neighbor, Park and Trail, and College / Museum Viewer Groups

VIEWPOINT 4A - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 13**

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Landscape District C | Route 198 at Mirror Lake Looking West | Motorist, Park and Trail Viewer Groups

VIEWPOINT 5 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 14**

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Landscape District C | Route 198 at Mirror Lake Looking West | Motorist, Park and Trail Viewer Groups

VIEWPOINT 5 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 15**

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Landscape District C | View From Pedestrian Bridge at Lincoln Parkway Looking West | Residential Neighbor, Park and Trail Viewer Groups

VIEWPOINT 5A - EXISTING | **FIGURE 16**

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Landscape District C | View From Pedestrian Bridge at Lincoln Parkway Looking West | Residential Neighbor, Park and Trail Viewer Groups

VIEWPOINT 5A - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 17**

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Landscape District C | View From Delaware Ave South of Route 198 Looking North | Park and Trail User Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 6 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 18**

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Landscape District C | View From Delaware Ave South of Route 198 Looking North | Park and Trail User Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 6 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 19**

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NYS ROUTE 198 | THE SCAJAQUADA PROJECT

Landscape District C | View from Albright Knox Art Gallery Looking North Towards Route 198 | College/Museum Patrons Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 7 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 20**

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Landscape District C | View from Albright Knox Art Gallery Looking North Towards Route 198 | College/Museum Patrons Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 7 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 21**

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NYS ROUTE 198 | THE SCAJAQUADA PROJECT

Landscape District C | East of Delaware Ave Looking East Towards Delaware Park | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 8 - EXISTING | **FIGURE 22**

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Landscape District C | East of Delaware Ave Looking East Towards Delaware Park | Motorist Viewer Group

VIEWPOINT 8 - ALTERNATIVE 2: Boulevard (Build Alternative) | **FIGURE 23**